

critical digest

505 FIFTH AVENUE, N. Y.
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New York Theatre Diary

The Fifth Season-re-opens Sept 5 matinee at Cort...Hayride-48th St-9/13/54. Jack Stone and Barron Howard present hillbilly musical based on Richmond, Va radio show of same name...The Pony Cart- De Lys 9/14/54. I B Joselow presents Roger Garis new play...Dear Charles-Morosco 9/15/54. Tallulah Bankhead stars...A Midsummer Night's Dream- Met Opera 9/21/54. Old Vic production with Moira Shearer ...Home Is The Hero- Booth 9/22/54. Theatre Guild- W.Minor present Walter Macken's play...All Summer Long- Coronet 9/25/54. Robert Anderson's new play with John Kerr, June Walker.

Gloria Vanderbilt Debut

The Swan production at Pecono Playhouse, Mountainhome, Pa. marked debut of Gloria Vanderbilt Stowski in her first role. Lead role required that she portray ashy princess, and NY critics differed on her histrionic ability. Lamar, Variety, billed her as one of the loveliest of the many theatrical princesses past and present. He felt Vanderbilt revealed a personal theatricalism lovely to see. But Herridge, Post, noted feared her debut in starring role merely emphasizes the effect of reciting, rather than being the role. Press coverage included Page 1 photos in NY News and NY Mirror.

Strawhat Tryouts

The Southwest Corner, John Cecil Holm's new play tried out at Saratoga, NY, has the necessary items to make it on Broadway, bets Russ, Variety. Cast of tryout featured Eva La Gallienne, Parker Fennelly and Enid Markey...Darling, Darling, Anita Loos new play presented at Westport, Conn, was rated a very bad play by Elm, Variety. Pointlessness and lack of taste of farce was demonstrated by number of empty seats after the second intermission...The Iron Gate, John T. Chapman's new play at Stockbridge, Mass, may have been a TV prize winner, but it will never win any legit prizes, pans Russ, Variety. A stage wise collaborator and top casting might save it, he suggested.

Hits Revisited

Can-Can is in its 14th month as a hit despite mild critical approval, recalls Hobe, Variety. Gwen Verdon's solo dancing and Michael Kidd's staging of dances remain musical's highspots he reports on recent visit. Verdon is still the show savor, who seems to have improved and developed during the run. George Irving is excellent in role originally held by Hans Conreid. While Norwood Smith is adequate in lead held by Peter Cookson.

Past Performance Data Needed

Statistics and performance charts on theatre people, such as are provided horse racing fans, are badly needed in the theatre, Chapman, News, urges. Critic would like to see an experienced racing handicapper turn his attention to the theatre.

' Off Broadway '

Sing Me No Lullaby, a new play by Richard Ardrey, the author of Thunder Book, opens the second season of Phoenix. 6 productions will be produced there this season, the first opening Oct 5. Sandhog, a musical based on a Theodore Dreiser story will be produced starting Nov 22.

National Theatre, 111 East Houston, which opens with A Stone for Danny Fisher Oct 27 is being remodeled. The 1500 seat theatre will have one of its two balconies removed...Stage Right Players will present Rickey, a dramatization of Charles Calitri novel at Carnegie Recital Hall starting Aug 27...Louisa Horton will star in The Pony Cart, the first I B Joselow production at Theatre de Lys opening Sept 14...The Chair is booking theatre parties at Originales only through the end of November...Shelley Bartolini is redecorating the Amato Opera Theatre which re-opens Sept 10...Chekov's Three Sisters will follow Dybuk at Fourth St Theatre...Ari Kutai, Israeli actor from Habima Theatre, will star in Sands of Negev opening at President Oct 19

The Chair, Originals Only current show, was recommended by Ernestine Karniol of the NY Public Library Theatre Collection staff, notes Freedley, Morning Telegraph. Each performer deserves acclaim she raved.

' West Coast '

That's Life revue at Las Palmas, L.A. will come to NY, while a second company continues in LA...Mary Martin opened in Peter Pan in LA inspite of a bad case of laryngitis and influenza...What Every Woman Knows will tour for 6 weeks on west coast starring Helen Hayes before opening Nov 1 at Geary, S.F....20th Century Fox Studio Club production of Dark of the Moon opens Sept 6 at Little Theatre on 1st...Will Rogers, Jr, starred in Pasadena Playhouse production of Al Wilderness.

' Vaudeville '

Rowena Rollins heads Palace vaudeville show, with ChariotTERS featured. Film is "The Raid" with Van Heflin.

' Theatre Book Comments '

"Five Plays" by Edmund Wilson (Farrar, Straus) were recommended for reading, if not production, by Krutch, Herald Tribune and Fergusson, Times. Former understands why dramas are not successful in the theatre and/or in a closet. The conflict of ideas, not characters, provides what vivid drama there is. Latter critic believes volume should fascinate readers of several kinds.

"103 Lyrics of Cole Porter" published by Random House is an excellent selection of the composer's best verse providing a happy memory filled excursion, rates Down, Variety..."Melodrama That Thrills" by M. Willson Disher (Macmillan) deals successfully and thoroughly with the power of the melodrama in the theatre, okay Variety mugg.

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 ' Green Room Department '

THEATRE vs TV...An unusual viewpoint on merits of theatre and TV is expressed by Burton Rascoe, one time World Telegram drama critic who is now writing a syndicated column on TV called "The First Nighter." When the theatre and motion pictures raise the quality of their productions to the general level of taste and intelligence maintained by the major TV drama producing unit, he argues, the chances are their prosperity will return. Philco Playhouse, Goodyear Playhouse, Westinghouse Studio One, United States Steel, Center Stage, Robert Montgomery and Kraft TV units were those cited by the ex-drama critic.

COLUMN TIPS...Truman Capote acts all roles, male and female, in auditions for backers for House of Flowers, reports Farrell...Shuberts have fixed up office in St. James theatre for visiting newsmen, notes Gardner...Female star of musical won't take vacation due her because her understudy gets ovation when she goes on, hears Kilgallen.

PRO EARLY OPENINGS...Though Chapman, News, insists that an 8 30 PM first night opening is best for all concerned, two of his colleagues dinner. Watts, Post, okays early time because it is easier to get cabs and many behave better in the theatre without that extra brandy...Morehouse, World Telegram & Sun, is for the 8 PM opening and he knows scores of other playgoers who feel the same way. He personally enjoys a meal after the show.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Theatre owes at least the bare reward of remembrance to Janet Achurch and Charles Charrington, English actress and producer, who introduced Ibsen to English drama in 1889. They were the pioneers of the "new" drama freedom that we now accept as a theatrical commonplace, states Burr, Playbill...More citizens will be able to get early tickets at legit prices from box office, mail and at agency as a result of Dear Charles ban on theatre parties.

NIGHT WORKERS...The best time for work is after sundown, when patience is unharried by the pressure from the world outside, states Times' Atkinson in Saturday Review. Critic who details joy of working at night wonders if the custom of working by day was not a serious mistake.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...Actresses must have good health, a willingness to work very hard, and an intelligent approach to acting as an art, Pocono Playhouse, PA, producer Rowena Stevens told Toomey, UP...Robert Sherwood admits that his 5 months a year stay in Europe does not produce much work, but he told Buchwald, Herald Tribune, that when he returns to NY he feels like a refilled fountain pen. The noisy NY traffic and the riveting machines make him feel raring to go.

 ' Pros & Cons by TMK '

Memba's Daughters revival with Ethel Waters as seen at Sea Cliff, NY, is a moving folk drama. After a slow start the star and the large cast directed by Richard Barr, bring life and emotion to Dorothy and DuBose Heyward's story. Except for one actor whose accent was impossible to understand the cast was perfect. The scenes ending with Miss Waters and the cast joining in Negro spirituals were truly beautiful.

Theatre sells when it is news, be it Broadway, Off Broadway or summer theatre. Success of Pocono Playhouse and Bucks County Playhouse this summer show how good business sense combined with a flair for knowing what is news attracts ticket buying fans to the box office windows. The long range planning which went into the success of both houses will pay off for these producers season after season.

TV's influence on the legit theatre will be felt directly this season. The Theatre Guild announces that it is planning to do three plays based on TV scripts produced by the Guild on their US Steel sponsored TV show. Welcome Home by N. Richard Nash, Garden in the Sea by Michael Dyne and Fearful Decision by Richard Mailbaum and Cyril Hume are the shows planned. Last season the Guild in association with Phil-Co TV Theatre producer Fred Coe presented Horton Foote's "The Trip to Bountiful" TV script on Broadway.

Plays

Sabrina Fair closed...Hayride, a hillbilly musical based on a Richmond, Va. radio program will be presented at 48th St Theatre by Jack Stone and Barren Howard opening Sept 13...Fanny entered rehearsal.

People

Josephine Hull returned to Solid Gold Cadillac after 3 month illness...Elliott Nugent has taken over lead role of Seven Year Itch while Tom Ewell makes the film version...Lilo is taking Mondays off from Can-Can instead of a vacation, she is replaced by Rita Damitri...Mildred Dunnock and Norris Houghton will give drama courses at Barnard College...Ronnie Graham has been added to cast of The Tender Trap...Helen Hayes will appear in What Every Woman Knows at City Center this winter.

Summer Playhouses

Deer Lake Theatre, Reading, Pa. closed Aug 7...Champagne Complex will play two weeks at Bucks County Playhouse, New Hope, Pa. Sabrina Fair with Tom Poston and Marian Walters opens there Sept 6.

Other Broadways

Pajama Tops, an adaption of a French farce, is being produced by Joe Roth to play THE ROAD on a 2-for-1 basis...Thornton Wilder's The Matchmaker, debuts at Edinburgh Festival with Ruth Gordon and Sam Levene. Production opens same night Old Vic will present Macbeth...Margo Jones' Dallas Theatre '54 will present William Case's Sea Change for one performance in Houston as benefit performance to help re-open the Houston Playhouse.

Theatre TV & Radio Notes

Judith Anderson will play Lady Macbeth in Maurice Evans Nov 28 NBC TV production of Macbeth...Ginger Rogers will make her TV debut in "Tonight at 8 30" NBC TV production of Noel Coward playlets...WNYC is presenting 10 BBC and French Broadcasting System productions in station's "Great Plays Festival."

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